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Message Text

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ACTION EUR-08

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 DODE-00 INR-05 INRE-00 CIAE-00
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O 121839Z APR 78
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0694
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INFO ALL NATO CAPITALS PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMCONSUL NAPLES
USDOCOSOUTH NAPLES IT
USNMR SHAPE BE
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER
CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON ENG

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LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: NATO, IT, UR
SUBJECT: ITALIAN CONCERN ABOUT SOVIET REQUEST FOR SHIP REPAIR FACILITIES IN NAPLES

REFS: (A) STATE 90640 (DTG 080122Z APR 78), (B) USNATO 3131 (DTG 242007 MAR 78), (C) ROME 4887 (DTG 151746Z MAR 78) (ALL NOTAL)
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SUMMARY: THE ITALIAN PERMREP HAS ASKED US TO CALL AN EARLY PRIVATE MEETING OF PERMREPS TO CONSIDER THE ISSUE OF SOVIET REQUESTS FOR ACCESS TO SHIP REPAIR FACILITIES IN ITALY. THIS MESSAGE REQUESTS URGENT GUIDANCE . END SUMMARY.

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1. ON THE FRINGES OF THE APRIL 11 PERMREPS LUNCH ITALIAN PERMREP CATALANO RAISED WITH THE AMBASSADOR HIS CONCERN ABOUT SOVIET REQUESTS FOR SHIP REPAIR FACILITIES IN NAPLES AND ASKED TO SEE THE AMBASSADOR URGENTLY TO DISCUSS US HELP AT NATO IN FENDING OFF SOVIET APPROACHES. D/SYG PETRIGNANI, AN ITALIAN, ECHOED CATALANO'S ANXIETY IN FORCEFUL TERMS. IN CALL

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ON THE AMBASSADOR AFTERNOON OF APRIL 12, CATALANO REHEARSED THE BACKGROUND ON SOVIET REQUESTS FOR ACCESS TO NAPLES PORT FACILITIES, NOTING THAT THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR HAD DANGLED VISIONS OF JOBS FOR "40,000" NEAPOLITAN SHIPYARD WORKERS BEFORE THE EYES OF THE COMMUNIST MAYOR OF NAPLES (CATALANO HAD REFERRED TO 20,000 IN APRIL 11 CONVERSATION). CATALANO SAID HE WAS AWARE THAT THE US IS INTERESTED IN SEEING ITALY RAISE THE ISSUE AT NATO. HOWEVER, HE POINTED OUT THE DIFFICULTY ITALY WOULD FACE IN DOING SO. IT WOULD HAVE MORE EFFECT IN ROME IF THE INITIATIVE AND CONCERN CAME AS AN ALLIED MATTER.

2. CATALANO SUGGESTED THAT THE US URGE SYG LUNS TO CONVENE A PRIVATE MEETING OF NATO PERMREPS IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE TO ADDRESS THE QUESTION. HE SAID THAT PETRIGNANI HAD MENTIONED THE ISSUE TO LUNS AND THAT LUNS WAS PREPARED TO CALL SUCH A MEETING IF REQUESTED TO DO SO. CATALANO SAID HE WOULD BE PREPARED TO ATTEND, TO OUTLINE THE SITUATION, AND TO EXPRESS HIS WILLINGNESS TO CONVEY TO ROME THE SENTIMENTS OF THE COUNCIL. IT WOULD ALSO BE USEFUL IF, AS A RESULT OF THE MEETING, HE COULD CONVEY TO HIS GOVERNMENT AN INDICATION THAT OTHER NATO NATIONS WERE NOT OPENING COMPARABLE FACILITIES TO THE SOVIETS. PERHAPS PREDICTABLY, CATALANO

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MADE A PASSING PLEA FOR A US COMMITMENT TO INCREASE THE AMOUNT OF REPAIR WORK BEING ASSIGNED TO ITALIAN YARDS, SAYING THIS WOULD BE A USEFUL COUNTER ARGUMENT FOR HIS GOVERNMENT TO USE DOMESTICALLY. CATALANO URGED THAT WE SUGGEST TO LUNS THAT A MEETING BE HELD AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, AND PREFERABLY BY FRIDAY, APRIL 14 SINCE MANY PERMREPS WOULD BE IN DENMARK FOR THE NPG MINISTERIAL NEXT WEEK.

3. THE AMBASSADOR NOTED THAT WE HAD ATTEMPTED TO DRAW OUT AN ITALIAN REACTION BY EMPHASIZING OUR GENERAL CONCERN OVER SOVIET ACCESS TO MEDITERRANEAN PORTS DURING THE MEDITERRANEAN DRAFTING SESSION UNDERWAY AT NATO THIS WEEK. HOWEVER, TO DATE CATALANO'S REPRESENTATIVE AT THE DRAFTING SESSIONS HAD NOT REACTED. THE AMBASSADOR ALSO NOTED THAT THE MED REPORT WOULD BE A NAC AGENDA ITEM IN THREE OR FOUR WEEKS. CATALANO SAID THAT WOULD BE TOO LATE AND PRESSED FOR A MEETING PRIOR TO THE PERMREPS DEPARTURE FOR DENMARK. THE AMBASSADOR PROMISED TO SEE WHAT WE COULD DO TO BE OF ASSISTANCE IN THIS REGARD.

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4. COMMENT: NOW THAT ITALIANS HAVE APPROACHED US FOR HELP, WE SEE MERIT IN RESPONDING TO CATALANO'S PLEA BUT WOULD DEFER TO EMBASSY ROME'S ASSESSMENT. WHILE WE WERE NOT ABLE TO ASCERTAIN THE PRECISE REASON FOR HIS SENSE OF URGENCY, IT IS CLEAR THAT BOTH CATALANO AND PETRIGNANI ARE CONCERNED AND PREPARED TO DO THEIR SHARE IN DISSUADING THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT FROM ACCEDING TO SOVIET REQUESTS.

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. WE, OF COURSE, WOULD PREFER NOT TO BE ALONE IN EITHER DESIRING A MEETING OR INDICATING THE FULL MEASURE OF OUR CONCERN AT SUCH A SESSION. WASHINGTON MAY WISH TO CONSIDER GOING DIRECTLY TO CAPITALS SUCH AS LONDON AND BONN TO ASSURE THAT WE HAVE SUPPORT IF A MEETING IS HELD. WE ALSO WOULD PREFER NOT TO HOLD A MEETING ON SUCH AN URGENT BASIS, BUT AGREE WITH CATALANO IT WOULD SLIP AT LEAST A WEEK IF IT IS NOT SCHEDULED BY APRIL 14.

5. ACTION REQUESTED: WASHINGTON GUIDANCE, IF POSSIBLE, BY 1600 BRUSSELS TIME APRIL 13 AS TO WHETHER WE

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MIGHT SUGGEST TO LUNS THAT HE CALL A MEETING THE
FOLLOWING DAY. BENNETT

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